

Ode to the West Wind

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and
markup by Students and Staff at the University of Virginia*

Table of Contents

- I.....
- II.....
- III.....
- IV.....
- V.....

ODE TO THE WEST WIND.* ^{Ode}

[Audio File], ^{Audio}

I.

1 O, wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
2 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
3 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

- 189 -

4 Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
5 Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O, thou,
6 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

7 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
8 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
9 Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow

10 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
11 (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
12 With living hues and odours plain and hill:

13 Wild Spirit, which art moving every where;
14 Destroyer and preserver; hear, O, hear!

II.

15 Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
16 Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
17 Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

18 Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
19 On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
20 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

- 190 -

21 Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
22 Of the horizon to the zenith's height
23 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

24 Of the dying year, to which this closing night
25 Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
26 Vaulted with all thy congregated might

27 Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
28 Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: O, hear!

III.

29 Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
30 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
31 Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

32 Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,
33 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
34 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

35 All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
36 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
37 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

- 191 -

38 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
39 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
40 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

41 Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
42 And tremble and despoil themselves: O, hear!

IV.

43 If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
44 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
45 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

46 The impulse of thy strength, only less free
47 Than thou, O, uncontrollable! If even
48 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

49 The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
50 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
51 Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
52 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.

53 Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
54 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

- 192 -

55 A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
56 One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V.

57 Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
58 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
59 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

60 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
61 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
62 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

63 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
64 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
65 And, by the incantation of this verse,

66 Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
67 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
68 Be through my lips to unawakened earth

69 The trumpet of a prophecy! O, wind,
70 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Footnotes

Ode *This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.

The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it. [Author's note]

Audio Librivox recording of "Ode to the West Wind," read by Leonard Wilson